

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Amidst questions of Federal funding and the efficiency of the budget process, there is a unique American success story, where a modest Federal investment has inspired a multibillion-dollar public-private partnership, the majority of the funds actually voluntarily provided by individual citizens supporting local education, cultural, current events, and even emergency information. I am referring, of course, to America's public broadcasting system, where every week more than 87 million Americans tune in to public television, and there are 30 million regular public radio listeners.

In virtually every community across the country, people can tune in to over 1,000 public broadcasting radio and television stations for programs that inform and inspire, for help with reading or job training, for the latest in digital services, for local news and unique information, and for a myriad of other special reasons. Because these local stations determine their own program schedules and often produce their own programming, they respond to community needs and leverage local support.

There has been a key role for us here in Congress. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting distributes an annual appropriation that we provide in accordance with a statutory formula, the vast majority of which goes directly to public radio and television stations.

While this Federal appropriation accounts for only 15 percent of the entire cost of public broadcasting, it leverages critical investments from State and local governments, from universities, businesses, foundations and, most important, those millions of viewers and listeners of public radio and television who provide their voluntary contributions.

Now, this public support from the Federal Government is critical, because it helps fill in gaps in addition to inspiring those partnerships. Make no mistake, if the Federal government reduces or eliminates its support, there will still be public broadcasting in the large metropolitan areas, New York, San Francisco. My hometown of Portland, Oregon, will have public broadcasting.

But what will suffer is not just the quality of the programming, but the expensive service to rural and small town America which cannot generate enough resources to provide its own service. That will suffer.

Sadly, again, this year, public broadcasting is under attack in the appropriations process. One of the most dismaying cuts would be the advance funding program for 2009, ending a 30-year practice. It goes back to 1975, where the Federal Government recognized that the long-term investment in these partnerships require people to be able to plan for the future. So we have provided a cost-free guarantee of future funding. It has provided long-term stability to make this unique partnership work, but, sadly, the appropriators would eliminate this advance funding.

Another cut, which is hard to fathom, would be taking away money for digital conversion at the same time the FCC is mandating that all broadcasters need to be compliant by February 2009. This funding would be for the third and final installment, which is important for leveraging money from other partners, State matching grants, for instance.

At a time when public broadcasting is leading the way for digital conversion, it is ironic that our appropriators would eliminate this program. It would take away funding for educational programs like Sesame Street, Between the Lions, and Maya and Miguel, putting them at risk. At a time we want highly qualified teachers ready to teach, Internet-based teacher professional development would also be eliminated.

These major reductions in funding would have an immediate and severe impact on our communities and our constituents, as I say, especially in small town and rural America. These cuts from the appropriating process are despite strong shows of support on a bipartisan basis for our colleagues urging full funding.

Last year we had an embarrassing political battle here on the floor of the House, where a bipartisan majority had to overturn the worst of the cuts. One can only hope that we will be spared this saga and that the appropriating process will provide the funds that American public broadcasting needs.